

Appleby Archaeology Group

At the December meeting of the Appleby Archaeology Group members enjoyed a talk by Niall Hammond, until recently the County Archaeologist for Durham, on the Archaeology of the Stainmore Pass. Mr Hammond described the findings of work done, prior to the widening of the A66 over Stainmore Pass in 1989-91. The talk was illustrated by a series of informative slides

The earliest evidence of human activity on Stainmore was the finding of worked flints which may indicate that there was a seasonal camp site in the mesolithic period (10000-4000BC). A record of pollen taken from a core sample of peat and carbon dating suggests that from 8000 BC the weather declined and by 1600BC the higher ground was abandoned and that the crops that were grown were rye and oats. From 3500BC there are rich sources of evidence which includes field systems, hut circles, burial cairns, and signs of ploughing. A complex of the different types of monuments can be identified at East Mellwater Farm. An indication that the pass was an important route from early times was the find of a hoard of metal work at Gilmonby that included socket axes, spearheads and uncast bronze presumably buried by the metal worker for safe keeping.

The Romans invaded Britain in 43AD. The northern tribe, the Brigantes, rebelled against them about AD70 and there is evidence of the Romans exerting their influence from that time. There was a marching camp at Rey Cross where the army halted overnight. The camp enclosed by an earth and stone rampart with an external ditch would have provided temporary accommodation for a legion of 6000 men. Later pieces of Roman pottery tell us that the camp was used again in the third century. The trans-Pennine route was protected by forts at Bowes and Brough occupied from the late first century and throughout the Roman period. Both forts had civilian settlements, vicus, nearby and the aqueduct that supplied water to Bowes still functions for part of its length. Between the two forts there is a series of earthworks which are thought to be signal stations.

There is sparse evidence of occupation after the Romans. The Vikings used the route as they travelled from York to Dublin and many place names are old Norse in origin. Rey Cross, which some claim to be Viking may have been a boundary mark between the Kingdoms of Northumbria and Strathclyde. One myth surrounding the cross is that it marks the burial of the Viking King, Erik Blood Axe. The Cross has probably been moved several times and there is now no evidence

of carving upon it.

In the medieval period the Normans built their castles on the Roman sites at Bowes and Brough but Barnard Castle became their power base. There is evidence of small scale farming. The only significant settlement was where Old Spital now stands, here the nuns from Marrick Priory in Swaledale established a house which provided hospitality to merchants and pilgrims travelling across the route.

Great changes took place during the 18th and 19th centuries. Bowes Moor was enclosed in 1760s and in 1781 the toll road was opened. Two toll houses stood one on either side of the road just east of the summit. In 1861 the railway superseded the road and remained open until 1963. Five roadside buildings, Dove Hall Farm, Spital Chapel and three out lying barns, had to be demolished for the A66 widening, careful dismantling of these uncovered many details all of which were carefully recorded .

Quarrying and mining have left their mark on Bowes Moor. There are also a number of lime kilns. Lime would have been in demand both for mortar and land improvement. The road itself is very difficult to date, several sections were examined and below the modern surface there is evidence of 20-30 surfaces but it is impossible to tell which are Roman and which later as no artefacts, such as coins, were found. It is however unlikely that between the Romans leaving and 1760s that there was any maintenance.

Mr Hammond was warmly thanked for taking the group over the Stainmore Pass through the centuries. and describing the history of that landscape.

The next meeting will be the AGM and Members Evening and will be on January 15th at The Intake Centre Appleby Grammar School starting at 6.30pm

Phyllis Rouston December 10, 2001